

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

WINDBREAK/SHELTERBELT ESTABLISHMENT

(Feet)

Code 380

DEFINITION

Linear plantings of single or multiple rows of trees or shrubs or sets of linear plantings.

PURPOSES

- To protect plants from wind related damage.
- To alter the microenvironment for enhancing plant growth.
- To manage snow deposition.
- To provide shelter for structures, livestock, and recreational areas.
- To enhance wildlife habitat by providing travel corridors.
- To provide living noise screens.
- To provide living visual screens.
- To provide living barriers against airborne chemical drift.
- To delineate property and field boundaries.
- To enhance aesthetics.
- To increase carbon storage.
- To enhance production of poultry operations.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

On any areas where linear plantings of woody plants are desired and suited.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable To All Purposes

NRCS personnel should work closely with West Virginia Division of Forestry personnel, the NRCS staff forester and biologist when using this practice.

Plant Guide and Plant Information Sheets for individual species found in the USDA Plants Database will be utilized to supplement the material in this standard. <http://plants.usda.gov>

The method of planting shall include hand or machine planting techniques and be suited to achieving proper depths and placement of the planting stock roots – See Tree and Shrub Establishment – 612.

Native plant materials will be used whenever possible.

The planned plant species will be tolerant of any nutrient, pesticide, mine drainage, or other chemical loading, where such loading cannot be corrected.

Species shall be suited for the planned practice purpose(s). They should also be adapted to the soils, climate and site conditions and be suited for the planned practice purpose(s). See Tables 1 and 2 in Appendix 1. Other species may also be suitable for use in windbreak/shelterbelt establishment. Consult with the West Virginia Division of Forestry personnel, the NRCS staff forester or biologist to determine suitability.

The location, layout and density of the planting will accomplish the purpose and function intended within a 20-year period.

The maximum design height (H) for the windbreak or shelterbelt shall be the expected height of the tallest row of trees or shrubs at age 20 for the given site. *Heights may be based on any of the following:*

Performance of the individual species in nearby areas on similar sites under similar conditions

Documented heights in the USDA Plants Database for a particular species and use

“20-year” and “mature” heights for some common tree and shrub species may be found in Tables 1 and 2 in Appendix 1.

The distance that protection extends from the windbreak’s leeward side is proportional to its height. The most effective zone of protection extends to a distance 2 to 5 times its height, while significant protection extends to 10 times its height.

Site preparation shall be sufficient for establishment and growth of selected species, not contribute to erosion, and be appropriate for the site. Refer to the publication “Windbreak Establishment” (University of Nebraska Extension E91-1764-B)

<http://www.unl.edu/nac/brochures/ec1764/ec1764.pdf>

and Forest Site Preparation – 490.

Plantings are to be located across prevailing wind direction and on hilly terrain, along the contour when possible.

Only viable, high quality and adapted planting stock or seed will be used.

Multiple species, within rows, may be used if heights and growth forms are similar.

The planting shall be done at a time and manner to insure survival and growth of selected species. See *Tree and Shrub Establishment* – 612.

Spacing between individual plants shall be based on the needed growing space for plant type and species, the accommodation of maintenance equipment, and the desired characteristics of the stem(s), branches and canopy as required for a specific purpose. See *Tables 1 and 2 in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2.*

Plantings will not interfere with structures, agricultural operations and above or below ground utilities

Plantings will be protected from livestock, grazing, and fire. In most instances other exclusionary measures will be necessary to protect plantings from wildlife browse during the establishment period. See Use Exclusion – 472, Tree and Shrub Establishment – 612, Firebreak -394 and Fence –382.

Avoid locations that will create hazards to safety and health such as road ditches, junctions, and utility rights-of-way.

Roadways should not be located along the rows of the windbreak; they should be at an angle or in curves to reduce wind tunneling.

Moisture conservation or supplemental watering shall be provided for plant establishment and growth where natural precipitation is too low for the selected species.

See Pest Management –595 if pesticide recommendations are needed on a particular site.

Comply with applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations during the installation, operation, and maintenance of this practice.

Criteria for Windbreak/Shelterbelt Design is contained in Appendix 2 of this standard.

Additional Criteria To Protect Growing Plants

The windbreak will be oriented as close to perpendicular to the troublesome wind as possible.

Sites, fields, and plants are protected within an area 10 times the design height (H) on the leeward side and two times the design height (H) on the windward side of the windbreak.

Additional Criteria To Manage Snow Deposition

The windbreak will be oriented as close to perpendicular to the snow-bearing wind as possible.

For snow distribution across a field, the windbreak density (during expected snow-producing months) shall not be less than 25 percent nor greater than 50 percent. The interval between barriers will not exceed 20H.

For snow accumulation, the minimum barrier density, during expected snow-producing months, will be 50 percent.

The windward row will be at least 100 feet from the area to be protected.

Windbreaks will be located so that snow deposition will not pose a health or safety problem or obstruct human, livestock, or vehicular traffic.

Where water erosion and/or runoff from melting snow is a hazard, it shall be controlled by supporting practices.

Refer to "Windbreaks for Snow Management" (University of Nebraska Extension E96-1770-X) for additional information.

<http://www.unl.edu/nac/brochures/ec1770/ec1770.pdf>

Additional Criteria To Provide Shelter For Structures, Livestock, and Recreational Areas

The planting will be oriented as close to perpendicular to the troublesome wind as possible.

For wind protection, the minimum barrier density will be 65 percent during the months of most troublesome wind and the area to be protected will fall within a leeward distance of 10H.

Drainage of snowmelt from the windbreak shall not flow across the livestock area.

Drainage of livestock waste from the livestock area shall not flow into the windbreak.

Refer to "Windbreaks for Livestock Operations" (University of Nebraska Extension E91-1764-B) for additional information.

<http://www.unl.edu/nac/brochures/ec1766/ec1766.pdf>

"Outdoor Living Barn: A Specialized Windbreak" (National Agroforestry Center, AF Note - 2).

<http://www.unl.edu/nac/afnotes/wb-2/wb-2.pdf>

Additional Criteria For Noise Screens

Noise screens shall be at least 65 percent dense during all times of the year, as tall as, and as close to the noise source as practicable.

The length of the noise screen shall be twice as long as the distance from the noise source to the receiver.

For high-speed traffic noise, the barrier shall not be less than 65 feet wide. *The edge of the planting should be 100-150 feet from the center of the nearest traffic lane. The tallest tree row should be capable of attaining a mature height of at least 45 feet.*

For moderate speed traffic noise, the barrier width shall not be less than 20 feet wide. *The edge of the planting should be 50-80 feet from the center of the nearest traffic lane. The tallest tree row should be capable of attaining a mature height of at least 30 feet.*

Species selected will be tolerant to noxious emissions, sand, and gravel depositions or salt spray from traffic areas.

Additional Criteria For Visual Screens

Visual screens shall be located as close to the observer as possible with a density, height and width to sufficiently block the view.

Use plants that will add color, texture, and diversity to the site.

Additional Criteria For Providing or Enhancing Wildlife Habitat or Travel Corridors.

Plant species selection shall benefit targeted wildlife species.

Design dimensions of the planting shall be adequate for targeted wildlife species.

Add rows to a planting to increase wildlife benefits. A minimum of one evergreen and one shrub row should be included among the additional windbreak rows.

Use plants of different sizes, growth forms, food bearing and densities to increase plant diversity.

The windbreak layout should include a partial east-west orientation, if possible

During winter months, direct sunlight is available on southern rows throughout the day. The opportunity to "sun" in a protected southern exposure decreases food needs for wildlife.

Additional Criteria For Environmental And Production Benefits For Poultry Operations

Poultry producers planning to establish windbreaks and/or shelterbelts must have written permission from their integrator.

The planting shall not interfere with operation access.

The potential of plantings to provide habitat for wild birds will be discussed with the landowner.

For tunnel-ventilated houses and planned retrofits to tunnel ventilation, multiple rows of dense evergreens around the farm perimeter make a good visual screen, vegetative filter, and windbreak. On the tunnel end of the house consider additional rows of dense evergreen or deciduous trees for maximum filtering during the summer months.

For greatest emissions scrubbing, tree lines should be as close to the tunnel exhaust fans as possible. In order not to interfere with fan efficiency, no trees should be planted closer than a distance of 5 times the diameter of the fans. On the inlet end of the house, tall evergreens or deciduous trees may be considered to provide a cooling effect of the air and soil during the summer months.

Minimum distance to the closest row of trees along the side of the house is 50 feet and on the ends of the house, 80 feet. Some integrators may require greater distances. Anticipated width of the tree spread at maturity needs to be considered when determining spacing intervals.

Trees planting around conventional ventilated houses require strategies to meet different objectives. On the north, east, and west perimeters of the farm, multiple rows of dense evergreens may be used as a visual screen, vegetative filter, and windbreak.

Prevailing winds in summer are usually from the southwest, to provide a partial visual screen with shade and minimum air blockage on this side, planting tall evergreens and/or deciduous trees with no lower limbs may be an option when located at least 100 feet from the houses.

For houses having a western sidewall exposure, tall wind-tolerant, deciduous trees for maximum roof shading has merit. Most houses require 80 –100 clear area for load-out purposes.

For the best wind lifting effect, the north and west rows of the windbreak should make a progression from low evergreen shrubs or trees on the windward side to taller evergreen trees for the leeward side.

On all farm types, a tree line is recommended to screen litter sheds and dead bird composting facilities. For tunnel-ventilated houses this may involve two sets of tree lines, one near the tunnel fans and another to screen the litter shed and composting facility.

Trees should not be planted near areas of outside litter stockpile since high nutrient concentration can kill trees.

Property lines, dwellings, traffic visibility, surface and sub-surface drainage, rights-of-ways, overhead and below ground utilities will also determine tree placement.

Avoid trees and shrubs that attract wild birds and those with wide crowns that may obstruct traffic.

Windbreaks should be 2 –5 rows wide.

Species chosen for windbreak establishment in conjunction with poultry farms should:

Be evergreen with maximum vegetative density, particularly at the lower canopy

Have a tap or deep root system

Be resistant to breaking and wind

Require minimal maintenance and care

Have medium to fast growth

Have waxy or hairy leaves to enhance dust collection

Species chosen for windbreak establishment in conjunction with poultry farms should not have:

Seed that is attractive to wild birds

Wide crowns with overhanging limbs

Possible species include:

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Eastern white pine</i> | <i>black locust</i> |
| <i>Virginia pine</i> | <i>green ash</i> |
| <i>loblolly pine</i> | <i>sweet gum</i> |
| <i>Eastern red cedar</i> | <i>yellow poplar</i> |
| <i>sawtooth oak</i> | <i>hybrid poplar*</i> |
| <i>red maple</i> | |

** Note: When using fast-growing species such as hybrid poplar, it is important to consider that such species are often relatively short lived.*

Additional Criteria For Enhancing Aesthetics

Use evergreen species and species with features such as showy flowers, brilliant fall foliage, persistent colorful fruits, or noteworthy growth forms and shapes.

Use a mix of large and small trees and shrubs.

Use curvilinear designs and small group plantings adjacent to interior rows to increase visual diversity.

Additional Criteria To Increase Carbon Storage

Select plants that are adapted to the site to assure strong health and vigor and plant the full stocking rate for the site.

Use fast growing species in a mix with long-lived species.

Maintain optimal water and nutrient needs for the planting.

CONSIDERATIONS

The needs of farming equipment will be considered when designing a windbreak/shelterbelt system.

To enhance aesthetics use evergreen species or species with features such as showy flowers, brilliant fall foliage, or persistent colorful fruits.

Selection of plants for use in windbreaks should favor species or varieties tolerant to pesticides used in the area.

Plants that may be alternate hosts to undesirable pests should be avoided. Cedar – apple rust is an example.

All plantings should complement natural features.

Tree or shrub rows should be oriented on or near the contour where water erosion is a concern. Where water erosion and/or runoff from melting snow is a hazard, it should be controlled by supporting practices.

Wildlife should be considered when selecting tree or shrub species. Species diversity,

including use of native species, should be considered to avoid loss of function due to species-specific pests.

Consideration should be given to adverse offsite effects.

Plants established in cropping systems should have root systems that do not affect crop growth and/or spread from root sprouts.

Consideration should be given to using a variety of species to lessen the chance of losing the entire planting to insects or disease, and to provide a more effective deflector of winds.

A moderately dense windbreak is more effective in reducing winds over a greater distance than a windbreak of higher density. The height and penetrability of the windbreak are more important in reducing wind velocity than the width of the windbreak.

The direction of the prevailing wind may change from season to season. Consider how to design a windbreak that will work all year.

Where site conditions allow, attempts should be made to curve windbreak rows to avoid angular appearance. Establishing an irregular edge can also reduce the linear appearance of windbreaks.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for applying this practice shall be prepared for each site and recorded using approved specification sheets, job sheets, technical notes, and narrative statements in the conservation plan, or other acceptable documentation.

Substrate material and site preparation necessary for proper establishment of the selected plants shall be included in the design.

USDA-NRCS, "Windbreak/Shelterbelt Conservation Practice Job Sheet", 1997, can be used.

At a minimum the following will be identified in the conservation plan (as appropriate):

Purpose of the windbreak/shelterbelt

Length

Width

Field location

Plant species

Plant guides

Plant sheets

Spacing

Stock size

Soil amendments

Planting method(s)

Method of browse control

Fencing specifications

Tree shelter specifications

Planting dates

Operation and maintenance plan

Replacement strategies

Thinning / Pruning schedule

Refer to "Windbreak Management" for guidance on maintaining a healthy and functional windbreak.

<http://www.unl.edu/nac/brochures/ec1768/ec1768.pdf>

Additional operation and maintenance requirements may be developed on a site-specific basis to ensure performance of the practice as intended.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

The following actions shall be carried out to insure that this practice functions as intended throughout its expected life. These actions include normal repetitive activities in the application and use of the practice (operation), and repair and upkeep of the practice (maintenance):

Replacement of dead trees or shrubs will be continued until the barrier is functional.

Supplemental water will be provided as needed.

Thin or prune the barrier to maintain its function. *Forest Stand Improvement - 666 and Tree/Shrub Pruning - 660.*

Inspect trees and shrubs every *6 months* and protect from adverse impacts including insects, diseases, or competing vegetation. *Plantings should also be checked after storm events.*

The trees or shrubs will also be protected from fire and damage from livestock and wildlife.

Periodic applications of nutrients may be needed to maintain plant vigor.

Where practical, management activities will be performed outside the primary nesting season March 15 – July 15. An exception may be for mowing or cultivation to control vegetative competition.

References

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USDA-NRCS, "Windbreak/Shelterbelt Conservation Practice Job Sheet", 1997, 4pp.

USDA-SCS, Technical Note ECOL SCI-Forestry, 190-LI-1, Benefits Associated with Feedlot and Livestock Windbreaks", January 1983.

USDA-SCS Technical Note ECOL SCI-Forestry, 190-LI-6, "Basic Windbreak Design Criteria for Farm and Ranch Headquarters Areas and Large Residential Lots", May 1986.

USDA-SCS, Technical Note ECOL SCI-Forestry, 190-LI-7, "Basic Design Criteria for Feedlot and Livestock Windbreaks", June 1986.

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Wight, Bruce, Theresa K. Boes and James R. Brandle, Windbreaks for Rural Living", University of Nebraska Extension EC 91-1767-X, University of Nebraska, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, North Dakota University and Forest Stewardship Program of the Nebraska Forest Service, 6pp.

<http://www.unl.edu/nac/brochures/ec1767/ec1767.pdf>

*WINDBREAK/SHELTERBELT
ESTABLISHMENT*

APPENDICES 1-2

Appendix 2

Criteria for Windbreak/Shelterbelt Design

Where sufficient space is available, windbreaks should contain a minimum of three rows of evergreen trees or two rows of evergreen trees and one row of evergreen or deciduous shrubs. When used the, the dense shrub row should be placed on the windward side to maximize wind and snow protection. Five to six rows are desirable to keep snowdrifts within the windbreaks.

Where drifting snow is a hazard, the windward row of plantings should be a minimum of 100 feet from the right-of-way of roads, highways, and railroads, and primary areas in need of protection unless state, county, or city regulations differ.

Where snow drifting is not a problem, the most effective planting distance from primary areas in need of protection to the inside (leeward) row should be approximately 60 feet.

Where possible, windbreaks should extend approximately 50 feet beyond areas in need of protection.

Windbreak Design and Layout

- A. Identify troublesome wind direction(s).
- B. Identify all areas needing protection.
- C. Inventory soils paying close attention to inclusions of difficult soils such as high/low pH or salts. Begin a starter list of species adapted to the site.
- D. Determine if topography will cause drainage concerns either into or away from the windbreak (e.g. feedlot runoff, snowmelt, etc.)
- E. Locate property lines, overhead and underground utilities and existing trees or shrubs which may be within or adjacent to the proposed windbreak.
- F. Determine whether or not access roads or lanes will cause breaks in the windbreak.
- G. Determine whether or not the proposed windbreak will obstruct the winter sun, picturesque views.

Or oncoming traffic near driveways.

- H. Determine if cold air drainage will be impeded causing frost problems for home gardens or orchards.
- I. Determine if use exclusion will be necessary to protect the planting from livestock or wildlife browsing.
- J. Determine whether wildlife considerations are important to the landowner.
- K. Avoid choosing species that may be alternative hosts for diseases, e.g. cedar-apple rust.

Orientation, Placement and Length

- A. Make a sketch (to scale) of the key items identified above.
- B. Position the windbreak as close to perpendicular to the most troublesome wind direction.
- C. For wind protection only, the tallest row needs to be 2-5H from the primary area needing protection. See Figure 1.
- D. For wind and snow protection, the most windward row needs to be between 100 and 200 feet from the windward edge of the primary protection area. Once that critical distance is met, check to see if the area needing protection is still within the 2-5H zone. See Figure 2.
- E. "One-leg" windbreaks are sufficient if the wind comes from one direction only.
- F. A "two-leg"(or more) windbreak is needed when troublesome winds deviate throughout the windy season. This type of windbreak is especially helpful for animal feeding situations. See Figure 3.
- G. Extend the windbreak 100 feet past the structures. There is a potential for end drifts of snow. See Figure 4.
- H. Try not to obstruct cool, summer breezes that may be desired by the landowner.

- I. Locate access roads from 100 to 500 feet from the ends of the windbreak to avoid snowdrift areas. If a lane must cut through a windbreak, it should cut through the windbreak at an angle to prevailing winds to prevent funneling of wind and snow drifting. See Figure 5.
- J. Avoid subsurface drain fields and septic systems. Species such as willow and poplar with aggressive root systems should not be planted within 100 feet.
- K. Avoid locating rows below power or telephone lines; allow for lateral spread of the mature crown plus 10-15 feet.
- L. Make sure all setbacks required for the farming operations are met.
- M. Locate new rows at least 50 feet from existing windbreaks (outside of the root-sapped area of the older trees and shrubs).

Number of Rows and Arrangement

- A. The objective is to reach a windbreak density > 65%.
- B. Use minimum row guidelines below to achieve desired densities:

Windbreak Type

Farmstead

2 rows - must be evergreen

Feedlot

2 rows - must be evergreen

Screens

High Traffic

6 rows - 3 rows must be evergreen

Med.-Low Traffic

3 rows - 2 must be evergreen

Visual

2 rows - 1 must be evergreen

Wildlife

5 rows - 1 must be evergreen

Field

2 rows of deciduous tree/shrub or evergreen

Living Snow Fence

Unsheltered Distance

<1000 feet

1 row of either shrub or evergreen

Unsheltered Distance

>1000 feet

2 rows - minimum one row of evergreen

Note: Additional rows may be used to enhance wildlife values, meet landowner objectives, increase diversity, improve aesthetics, and increase density

- C. Place shrubs and short trees in outer rows. See Figure 6.
- D. A single row may work in some instances, but losses from the windbreak should be considered.
- E. In snowy areas a snowtrap row of shrubs can be planted 50-100 feet to the windward side of the windbreak.
- F. Under snowy conditions, place species prone to snow breakage in leeward rows.
- G. Some suggested combinations and arrangements include:

For 1 row: Use a dense tall evergreen

For 2 rows: Medium evergreen, tall evergreen

For 3 rows: Dense shrub, tall evergreen, and medium evergreen

For 4 rows: Shrub, medium evergreen, tall evergreen, and medium deciduous or evergreen.

For 5+ rows: Combination of shrubs, evergreen and deciduous trees that allow snow trapping, crown development, etc.

Spacing

- A. *Between rows: generally 12 to 20 feet. Make sure there is adequate room for maintenance and/or tillage equipment.*
- B. *Between plant spacing in the row (Based on 20-year height)*

Low shrubs (<10 feet)

Single row 3-5'

Multiple row 3-6'

Large shrubs (> 10 feet)

Single row 5-8'

Multiple row 6-8'

Small evergreen trees (<25 feet)

Single row 5-8'

Multiple row 6-8'

Deciduous columnar trees (any height)

Single row 5-8'

Multiple row 6-8'

Low deciduous trees (<25 feet)

Single row 6-10'

Multiple row 8-14'

Tall evergreen trees (>25 feet)

Single row 8-12'

Multiple row 8-16'

Tall deciduous trees (>25 feet)

Single row 8-12'

Multiple row 10-18'

- C. *Spacing should allow for crown closure within about 10 years without undue competition between adjacent plants in later years.*
- D. *Stagger plantings so that the plants in one row will be planted opposite the opening of another row.*

Example:

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X  X  X  X  X  X  X  X
  X  X  X  X  X  X  X
X  X  X  X  X  X  X  X

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- E. *Row spacing should be at least 2 feet wider than any equipment planned for between-row maintenance.*

Field Windbreak Design and Layout

- A. *Optimum deposition of snow to the leeward side (where applicable).*
- B. *Unobstructed view of oncoming traffic at road intersections; no crown or root obstruction of utility lines, etc.*
- A. *Wind funnel effects through gaps minimized*
- B. *Farming operations not obstructed.*
- C. *Adapted species chosen for soil conditions, herbicide resistance, etc.*

***Figure 1. Cross-section of a windbreak -
Wind Protection Only.***

***Figure 2. Cross-section of windbreak -
Wind and Snow Protection Only***

Figure 3. Area protected by windbreaks

Figure 4. Typical snowdrift pattern near ends of windbreaks.

Figure 5. Access lanes and roads should be at an angle to prevailing or troublesome winds.

Figure 6. Placement of slower growing and shorter trees and shrubs.